

FORWARD IN FAITH

2016 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Future of Catholic Life in the Church of England

Address by the Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Burnley

I wonder what question Donald Trump is now asking himself. Maybe it's this: 'What was the point of all that?' So many months of hard effort, non-stop campaigning and vast expenditure, and all he's left with is four years of seeking to solve unresolvable global issues within a complex and dysfunctional political system. What was the point?

'What was the point of all that?' It's a good question to ask of the years we spent campaigning for proper provision as the Church of England moved towards the consecration of women as Bishops. All those debates and documents and attempts to have some say in the synodical process. All that hard work done by Forward in Faith and the Catholic Group in Synod. What was the point? Why did we bother?

Was it pride because we couldn't bear the thought of losing? Was it the desire to build for ourselves a comfy hospice in which the traditionalist Catholic Movement could die in comfort and in clean sheets? Or was there more to it?

Again and again throughout the debate Fr David Houlding would come up with the same mantra: 'Provision is for the mission.' And that surely is the heart of the matter.

The purpose of the Church is two-fold: worship and witness. Our purpose is to bring new disciples to Jesus in the Eucharist. We needed provision in order to be absolutely sure of the sacraments to which we bring people. What was the point of all that? The answer: provision is to enable us to win souls for Jesus Christ.

If that's the case, then we need to get on with it! We have The Society. We have Forward in Faith. We have a line of bishops whose orders we can accept. We have over 400 resolution Parishes. We have a future. So now it's time to change the language and get on with the mission. Because if we don't there was no point!

To this end, earlier this year, twenty younger clergy met for 48 hours in York to set some priorities for the future of The Society. Their task was to form a mission agenda for those of our tradition. Against a backdrop of decline, it was nothing less than to plot out a future for catholic life in the Church of England. All twenty have experience of growing the local Church.

We asked ourselves some big questions. What is catholic evangelism? What is the distinctive contribution that catholics can make to the re-evangelisation of the nation? What are the features of parishes in our tradition that are growing? The conversations were facilitated (but not dominated) by presence of five of the bishops.

There was a wonderful sense of energy and purpose. These priests really enjoyed having space and permission to speak positively about good things they had seen and strategies for growth they had employed. And from it all an agenda for mission emerged. We wrote a set of six priorities that we believe parishes of our integrity need to focus on if they are to grow.

From it all the list printed below has emerged. These are the areas of our common life that we think we need to focus on really strongly if the Catholic Movement in the Church of England is to

renew itself. This list is still in very draft form and the final document will be different from what you see printed here. Because what we need now is the views of as many clergy and laypeople as possible. Like any strategy for growth, this will only work if our parishes feel enthused by it and engage with it.

There are some amazing things happening in parishes round the country. Many are growing. Many are drawing new people to faith. Many are reaching out to serve in imaginative ways. What we want is for stories like these to be the norm, for the Catholic Movement to recapture the evangelistic energy which brought it into life and which transformed the Church of the nineteenth century. Let's hope a clear and unifying vision can play some part in our doing that.

The Future of Catholic Life – The Six Priorities

1A Forming All the Baptised in Christ

Our aim is to form the whole people of God in their knowledge and practice of the Christian faith so that they can grow into the full likeness of Christ in a lifelong journey of formation that will bear fruit in service and witness. To enable this we will call people to growth in holiness through prayer and the study of Scripture. We will foster strong and sustainable patterns of lay leadership and service, aiming especially to draw people from BAME backgrounds into leadership roles. We will produce catechetical material, a rule of life and find more vigorous ways of calling people to service. We will create a standing theological commission combining the gifts of laypeople and the Ordained.

1B Making Young Disciples

80% of Christians find faith under the age of 21 so young people lie at the heart of our strategy. Our aim is to awaken in young people a sense of the joy that Christ takes in them. To enable this we will find ways of calling and training paid and volunteer youth and children's leaders in the Catholic tradition and ensure that Parishes have access to good resources. We will give young people a voice in the life of the local Church and draw them into leadership roles. We will ensure that clergy are equipped to minister to children and young people in schools and colleges

2A Offering Worship that Transforms

Worship is our purpose and the heart of our life. Our aim is to offer to God worship of the highest quality with prophetic preaching that will sustain and strengthen us for a life of prayer, witness and service. To enable this we will encourage every local Church to reflect on and enrich its worshipping life and find ways of developing those who have a ministry as preachers. We will celebrate the rich and varied devotional life offered by our tradition. We will invest in church music and celebrate the built environment through buildings that are beautiful, well ordered, accessible and foster the best in Christian art and creativity.

2B Celebrating Sacramental Priesthood

Our aim is to recapture and celebrate a Catholic and Anglican understanding of the priestly role in the service of the Church. We want to foster a healthy relationship between clergy and laypeople that is anchored in the recognition of a shared baptismal identity and bears fruit in service and empowerment. We will engage with national debate about the nature of the Church and the role of the priest. We will take active steps to foster priestly vocations and encourage clergy to deepen relationships with each other in order to be mutually accountable. We will use teaching days, conferences and learning communities to encourage lifelong priestly formation.

3A Being Intentional in Evangelism

Our aim is to be bold and confident as we invite all to a living faith in Jesus Christ whose Church serves and transforms community and is a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. To enable this we will create in each of our local Churches a culture of permanent invitation and warm hospitality. We will take active steps to equip our people for personal witness and encourage evangelistic and teaching events regionally and locally. We will plant new Eucharistic communities and we will enable clergy and

laypeople to access training in styles of leadership that foster Church growth. We will root all our efforts in prayer for those who do not yet know Jesus Christ as Lord.

3B Serving the Common Good

As Catholics in the Church of England we have a strong vision of the dignity and purpose of human life set free by the saving work of God in Christ. Our aim is to apply this to the world in which we live as we work for the common good. To enable this we will be a prophetic voice for those who face poverty, injustice or abuse, especially the young, and we will commit ourselves to service and proclamation in the most deprived parts of the country. We will engage more fully in the world of education and play our part in protecting the integrity of creation.

The Future of Catholic Life – What do YOU Think?

We now need your views on these six priorities. You might like to think about the following questions:

- Do you agree that the six priorities we have listed are the right ones for the Catholic Movement for the next five years? If not, what would you change?
- Which is the most important of the six and why?
- What would the implications of this mission strategy be for your parish?
- What should be our first steps in implementing this strategy?
- Do you have any other general comments about this mission strategy?